

## In Harm's Way

### Church seeks to support chaplains and those left behind during deployments

*By Jerry Hames of Episcopal Life*

A blast in the dead of night tossed Chaplain (LTC) John Weatherly from his bed at the Al Azad Marine Air Base near Baghdad. In Mosul, Chaplain (Capt.) David Sivret of Maine saw only a white flash before he was thrown 10 feet by an explosion that killed 22 people.

Weatherly and Sivret are two of 55 Episcopal chaplains who since 2001 have stood alongside men and women in the armed services in Bosnia, Kuwait, Afghanistan and Iraq – ministering to these soldiers “in harm’s way,” as Bishop George Packard, the presiding bishop’s director for chaplaincies, aptly describes it. Five chaplains currently are deployed in Kuwait, Afghanistan and Iraq; others have been notified that their units are on standby for possible deployment...

Sitting across a table three months ago in the canteen at Fort Dix, New Jersey, Weatherly, an Army Reserve chaplain, expressed impatience about the days it would require to complete his debriefing and medical exams before he could leave for home. Over coffee and a sandwich, he talked about his deployment to Iraq with an Army Blackhawk unit from Richmond, Virginia, as well as an earlier one to Bosnia. Weatherly is one of a few Episcopal chaplains called for active duty a second time.

It was on the eve of that first deployment, when he supervised eight chaplains ministering to a division of mainly peacekeeping troops, that Weatherly experienced his first stress and emotional turmoil.

“I had left my wife and three children in Virginia and was with my troops in New Jersey. Now one of them was on the phone. ‘Do you have to go now?’ he asked me.

“‘Yes, I do,’ I told him. The next day, we were in the air to Bosnia. It was Sept. 12, 2001. Here, our nation is being invaded, and I’m leaving my family.”

After that year in Bosnia, neither he and his family nor many of his parishioners at St. Mark’s Episcopal Church, Alexandria, Virginia, where he is rector, ever thought he would be recalled. But the war with Iraq be-

gan and Weatherly, with a battalion of 420 troops that included 125 pilots of Blackhawk helicopters that carry Marines in and out of battle, were on the ground in Iraq in 2005.

“My duties included providing not only religious support, crisis intervention and counseling to the unit I was assigned to, but also hospital and chapel coverage for the air base. One week a month I was on call at the base hospital,” he said.

“As a chaplain, we say we provide three forms of support: to encourage the living, comfort the wounded and honor the dead. Each week I was on call presented opportunities for each kind of ministry.”

His time in Iraq became a powerful experience. “You respect every soldier out there. You don’t think of them as an 18-year-old kid. They look at things in a very profound way.”

When chaplains go to war, who looks after their families and parishes? “Everybody is a victim of combat stress,” said William Lennon, clinical director of a Community Counseling Center for the U.S. Army.

Weatherly’s parish in Alexandria, with 250 members, two priest associates and a seminarian, had a wealth of resources within easy reach. Just three miles from the Pentagon, the parish had members whose daily lives were linked with the federal government or the nation’s security. Weatherly said his senior warden was a retired U.S. Air Force officer, the junior warden was a retired U.S. Army major and there was general acceptance when he was called to active duty.

*Editor’s note: This is submitted by Margaret H. Weatherly (John’s mother) who noted that John is a member of RMC, a property owner in Randolph and was hutmaster at Carter Notch Hut when in college and will officiate at the Randolph Church on July 22nd. He has loved and climbed the White Mountains all his life.*

*This article is reprinted (in part) courtesy of the Episcopal Life, May 2007, Vol. 18, #5 and can be accessed in its entirety at [www.episcopal-life.org](http://www.episcopal-life.org)*